



Paraprofessional Competencies & Professional Development Options

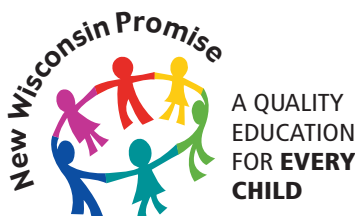
WISCONSIN DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION
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Paraprofessional Competencies and Professional Development Options

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Also available on our website: dpi.wi.gov/cal/calpara.html

January 2006

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Special thanks and appreciation to the task force for their expertise and time to make this document possible.

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Acknowledgments

Special thanks to:

OFFICE OF THE STATE SUPERINTENDENT

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Contents

	Page
Task Force	iii
Acknowledgments	iv
Contents	v
Introduction	1
Competencies for Paraprofessionals	2
Orientation of Paraprofessionals	6
Professional Development Options	7
Continuing Education	9
Non-Degree Certificates	10
1-Year Programs and 2-Year Programs	10
Baccalaureate Degree	10

Introduction

Paraprofessionals provide an invaluable service to students and teachers. Paraprofessionals working with students in Wisconsin schools are expected to possess basic competencies, skills, and knowledge gained before, within, or further developed during employment. It is recommended that paraprofessionals enhance those competencies, skills, and knowledge throughout their careers. However, in order to meet the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) requirements under Section 1119, DPI published the Title I Paraprofessionals Assessment Guidelines in March 2003. The publication can be found at dpi.wi.gov/cal/calpara.html.

This document is a framework for all paraprofessionals in their pursuit of professional development. This professional growth may occur through options such as continuing education, non-degree certificates, 1-year programs, 2-year programs, or a baccalaureate degree.

Paraeducator, special education assistant, aide, teaching assistant, instructional assistant, Title I paraprofessional are position titles often used in school settings. In this document, the term paraprofessional is used to cover this variety of titles.

To assist school districts and all paraprofessionals as they work on professional development, DPI has developed these competencies. This document was developed with the involvement of educators, administrators, paraprofessionals, and content specialists and reflects the multiple approaches used in Wisconsin schools. Though not mandatory, these competencies provide a useful framework for establishing the needs and means for professional development.

This document is a framework for all paraprofessionals in their pursuit of professional development.



Competencies

Competencies include skills and/or knowledge an individual should have in order to perform a specific job adequately. In addition to these general competencies for paraprofessionals, specialized guidelines may be developed and utilized for specific roles and situations. These might include skills and knowledge related to early childhood/intervention, students with disabilities, English as a second language, transitional programs, technology, health and safety, and physical therapy or occupational therapy for students with disabilities.

Content Areas

1. Support and Collaboration

The paraprofessional has an understanding of the respective roles and responsibilities of licensed staff (teachers, administrators, education specialists, etc.) in supporting students and collaborating with each other.

Competencies

- 1.1 Provide assistance with individualized instruction through various instructional strategies.
- 1.2 Assist students according to directions given by the teacher.
- 1.3 Serve as a proctor during testing, as appropriate.
- 1.4 Assist the teacher in preparing necessary instructional materials.
- 1.5 Apply effective methods for enhancing student's working knowledge of core subjects at appropriate levels.
- 1.6 Follow written and oral instructions.
- 1.7 Organize time, materials, and workspace.
- 1.8 Practice ethical and professional standards of conduct, including confidentiality.
- 1.9 Apply work-related legal issues concerning the education of children and youth.
- 1.10 Follow work-related health, safety, and emergency procedures.

2. Communication

The paraprofessional has the ability to communicate with colleagues, follow instructions, and use problem-solving and other skills that will enable him/her to work as an effective member of the instructional team.

Competencies

- 2.1 Interact effectively in the workplace.
- 2.2 Recognize, describe, and report student behavior and academic progress to the teacher.
- 2.3 Impart information at the child's level of comprehension.
- 2.4 Use a variety of technological tools to communicate.

3. Growth and Development of Children and Youth

The paraprofessional has an understanding of the various developmental stages of children and youth.

Competencies

- 3.1 Recognize patterns of human development and benchmarks typically achieved at different ages, as related to instruction.
- 3.2 Recognize risk and environmental factors that may prohibit or impede typical development, as related to instruction.
- 3.3 Recognize the expected behavior of children and youth.
- 3.4 Use age-appropriate materials for instructional reinforcement.



4. Behavior Management

The paraprofessional has the ability to assist in supporting and managing positive student behavior.

Competencies

- 4.1 Assist in basic classroom management.
- 4.2 Establish positive relationships with students.
- 4.3 Supervise students in the classroom and other locations.
- 4.4 Promote student self-esteem.
- 4.5 Model and assist the instruction of citizenship, social skills, and respect for others.
- 4.6 Assist with mediating minor student conflicts.
- 4.7 Describe student behavior and report characteristics and changes to the teacher and/or administrator.
- 4.8 Redirect inappropriate behavior through approved methods.

5. Instructional Strategies

The paraprofessional has knowledge of and can assist the teacher in applying the elements of effective instruction.

Competencies

- 5.1 Use appropriate strategies and techniques to provide instructional support.
- 5.2 Possess a basic level of competency in core academic subjects at the appropriate levels.
- 5.3 Use correct English, spelling, grammar, and punctuation.
- 5.4 Correct and score students' work.
- 5.5 Conduct small group instruction as prescribed by the teacher.
- 5.6 Provide individualized instruction as prescribed by the teacher.
- 5.7 Demonstrate various instructional activities as prescribed by the teacher.
- 5.8 Assist the teacher with planning and organizing instructional activities and developing classroom procedures.

6. Diversity

The paraprofessional has an awareness of and respect for diversity among children, youth, families, and colleagues.

Competencies

- 6.1 Demonstrate an awareness of and respect for how diversity impacts student learning.
- 6.2 Demonstrate an awareness of student disabilities by category.
- 6.3 Recognize how ethnic and cultural differences affect and enrich the school and community.
- 6.4 Apply discipline techniques impartially and consistently.
- 6.5 Know the school organization and its community.
- 6.6 Support high expectations for all students.

7. Technology

The paraprofessional has knowledge and skills necessary to support instruction using technology.

Competencies

- 7.1 Use computers, software packages, and related information technology devices.
- 7.2 Use assistive technology, when applicable.
- 7.3 Operate audiovisual equipment.
- 7.4 Assist students in using hardware, software, and other information technology.
- 7.5 Use administrative and technical skills necessary to assist the implementation of programs.

8. Commitment to Professional Growth

The paraprofessional is committed to being a reflective practitioner and to participate in professional growth.

Competencies

- 8.1 Secure and maintain special education or other licenses, when applicable.
- 8.2 Participate in continuing education programs, staff development workshops, and professional training opportunities.
- 8.3 Document professional development through such vehicles as portfolios.

Orientation of Paraprofessionals

District Orientation

1. Paraprofessional orientation prior to working with students may include:

- paraprofessional roles and responsibilities
- district overview
- district policies and procedures
- district discipline policy
- confidentiality issues
- safety and emergency procedures
- employment or contract information

2. Paraprofessional orientation during the first few days at the work site may include:

- introduction to building staff
- introduction to building site policies
- procedures and services
- opportunity to learn by observing and working alongside others
- introduction to classroom curriculum, classroom rules, and procedures
- school behavior management plan
- specific student information, as appropriate



Professional Development Options

Professional development options provide opportunities for paraprofessionals to gain knowledge and skills that will enhance their professional growth, and in turn, increase their contributions within the educational community. The figure below demonstrates different routes for professional development that may be available through school districts and other sources.

Figure 1



Figure 2

Professional Development Options

Orientation	Continuing Education	Non-Degree Certificates	1-Year Programs	2-Year Programs	Baccalaureate Degree
Basic competencies, skills, and knowledge training	Examples: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workshops • Coursework • In-services • Other training opportunities • CESAs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • WEAC/PDA • Technical Colleges • Universities and Private Colleges • Other 	Technical College, University, or Private College Certificate (Paraprofessional or Related Field)	Technical College, University, or Private College Degree (Paraprofessional or Related Field)	Baccalaureate Degree in Teaching or Related Field

There are a variety of ways professional development can be obtained, ranging from a smorgasbord of learning opportunities to a systematic approach to learning. In the smorgasbord model, participants take classes or workshops on many different topics of their interest. An example of this approach is found in the Continuing Education option, shown in Figure 2.

A systematic approach would provide an organized path to learning, and paraprofessionals could select continued education courses. This model of professional development enables the paraprofessional to take part in learning experiences that build upon each other, become progressively more focused and in-depth, and are tailored to the paraprofessional's job situation or career goals. Examples of systematic approaches to learning are the Non-Degree Certificates, 1-Year Programs, 2-Year Programs, and Baccalaureate Degree, as shown in Figure 2.

Continuing Education

Paraprofessionals are team members responsible for assisting in the delivery of instruction and other direct services. Continuing education for paraprofessionals may include on-the-job training, in-service training, teacher/paraprofessional training, and conference activities. A listing of potential delivery providers for professional development follows.

- School district sponsored paraprofessional in-services and on-the-job training
- School district sponsored teacher/paraprofessional in-services
- Organizations: business, professional, and community
- National, state, and local associations
- Wisconsin Education Association Council and WEA Professional Development Academy
- Cooperative Education Service Agencies
- American Federation of Teachers – Wisconsin
- Private vendors

Specific professional development content areas may include child development, ethical, medical, or technical issues, but need not be limited to such areas.

Possible Topics:

- Behavior management and discipline
- Child development and developmentally appropriate practice
- Core academic subjects and instructional strategies
- Teachers and paraprofessionals working in teams
- Confidentiality and ethics
- Stress management
- Basic computer skills
- Data collection
- Conflict resolution
- Reporting of child abuse
- First aid
- Basic understanding of specific disabilities
- Health care procedures
- Prevention and control of communicable diseases
- Specialty care (lifting, back care, etc.)
- CPR

Specific professional development content areas may include child development, ethical, medical, or technical issues, but need not be limited to such areas.

Non-Degree Certificates

Paraprofessionals may seek opportunities for in-depth skill building and career development tied to the content areas. Non-degree professional development for paraprofessionals usually results in certificates of completion. A listing of potential delivery systems for professional development follows.

- Technical Colleges
- Cooperative Education Service Agencies
- WEA Professional Development Academy
- Universities and Private Colleges
- Other

1-Year Programs and 2-Year Programs

Some technical colleges, universities, and private colleges offer programs of study for paraprofessionals that lead to a 1-year certificate or 2-year degree. Many of these programs allow credit for appropriate related work experience.

1-year programs can usually be completed within one year if the student is enrolled on a full-time basis.

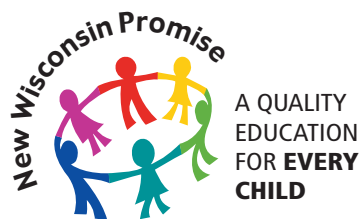
Classes that might be offered in such programs include:

- Managing classroom behavior
- Technology in the classroom
- Child and adolescent development
- Overview of special education
- Instructional strategies

2-year programs can usually be completed within two years if the student is enrolled on a full-time basis. Many such programs focus on early childhood education and paraprofessional careers and often provide the foundation for further study at a four-year university or college.

Baccalaureate Degree

Paraprofessionals may choose to participate in traditional teacher education or alternative pathways that lead to teacher certification. Paraprofessionals may take evening, weekend, and summer classes through a college or university, onsite or online, to earn a bachelor degree. Paraprofessionals may opt for a teacher education program that leads to certification. Other programs involve collaborative effort among a school district, the local association or union, and a university or college. Some of these programs may allow paraprofessionals to use their current employment situation as a practicum, thereby gaining college credit for the work they perform.



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